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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001316

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD PC CHAIRMAN PUSHES FOR PROJECTS AND
POLITICAL SUPPORT

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1055 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 757 (NOTAL)

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Classified By: PRT LEADER JOSPEH P. GREGOIRE FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Baghdad Provincial Council (BPC) Chairman Mueen expressed his desire on April 19 to move toward a normalized relationship with the Embassy. He insists, however, on more coordination of local projects and greater respect for the authority of the BPC. He reiterated the continuing demand for compensation for the victims of the March 26 US-Iraqi Valhalla military operation (ref A). Lastly, he said Embassy engagement with the Baghdad City Council is damaging the relationship between the U.S. and the BPC. END SUMMARY.

Chairman Mueen wants a 'New Relationship'

[1](#)2. (C) A meeting April 19 between BPC Chairman Mueen Al-Khadhemy and the PRT-Baghdad Team Leader was the first communication between the two since the commencement of the BPC's boycott of the Embassy on March 27. Also attending the meeting was BPC Security Committee Chair Riyadh Abdul Allah, Media Committee Chair Dr. Saleh Salem, PRT Deputy Team Leader, and PRT/IPAO. Mueen began the meeting by saying he wants to see the relationship between the BPC and the PRT improve, agreeing with PRT Team Leader that the freeze has held back ongoing development and security projects in the province. There is a need, he said, for increased mutual understanding and respect between all parties involved, citing the recent controversy over the Valhalla raid as an example of this need.

[1](#)3. (C) When questioned by PRT Team Leader about a timeline for resuming a normal dialogue, Mueen deferred giving specifics, saying the BPC has a 'process it needs to pursue.' He then explained that the BPC has a commission, which he chairs, that will evaluate and assess the terms of the BPC-Embassy relationship.

Project Funding Considerations

¶4. (C) Turning to the topic of projects, Mueen expressed concerns about the BPC's capacity to play a serious role in urban reconstruction. PRT members replied that in contrast to the funds available through both the Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PRDC) and through the PRT itself that are only a small part of the total U.S. funds underwriting a larger reconstruction plan, the Coalition has committed more than a billion dollars in Baghdad projects to date. Mueen, expressing unawareness of the scope of U.S. reconstruction in the province, requested that more detailed information be made available to the BPC about proposed and ongoing projects. PRT staff discussed possible uses for the \$7.3 million available to the PRDC for projects, suggesting that the PRDC consider focusing the money on a smaller number of high-visibility projects serving a broad section of the city as opposed to the 42 small projects currently under PRDC review. Chairman Mueen suggested a hospital renovation project might meet this goal.

BPC Needs a Vision for Reconstruction

¶5. (C) PRT members also raised concerns previously mentioned by the Baghdad mayor and others about the BPC project review process, citing concerns that it does not provide sufficient technical vetting or reflect a coherent strategic vision for reconstruction. The latter appeared to be an unfamiliar concept to the BPC members, who requested several examples of what a strategic vision might entail. In response, PRT emphasized the importance of identifying one through communication and coordination between all parties involved in long-term reconstruction, particularly between the BPC and Baghdad City Hall. Team leaders emphasized this is important

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since the dominant role of the Coalition in Baghdad is coming to an end, citing the upcoming Focused Stabilization Initiative as one of the last new programs being initiated by the United States and Coalition partners.

¶6. (C) Chairman Mueen explained that the BPC's ability to put forward a strategic vision has been constrained by insufficient information about and inadequate control over projects and programs. He and the other BPC members present agreed that the BPC could more easily come up with a vision if the BPC were in a stronger position to set development priorities and agendas than is now the case. He went on that that the BPC, unlike councils in other provinces, must also contend with the competing visions of each central government ministry, all of which are based in Baghdad. Neither Mueen nor his colleagues evinced having any broad vision for the city, however, only particular projects -- boat services and city gates, for example -- which they see as long-term objectives.

Concerns about Relations with NACS & DACS

¶7. (C) The discussion about project challenges led to another of central concern to the BPC -- its relationship with the neighborhood and district-level advisory councils (NACs, DACs). Mueen characterized the relationship as difficult, saying the DACS consider the BPC dictatorial and fail to acknowledge the primacy of the BPC in local government. He asked several times that the Embassy, in its dealings with the DACS and the NACS, take pains to reinforce the role of the BPC, noting that to do so would benefit all parties. He went on to explain that the BPC can coordinate the activities of the DACs on general issues, citing as an example the BPC's recent efforts to respond to Baghdad's population of internally displaced people. He also expressed a desire to enhance the BPC's effectiveness in provincial security

through a stronger relationship with district-level security councils.

¶8. (C) Chairman Mueen made clear his frustration with the low degree of BPC involvement in projects at district and neighborhood levels. He said the BPC needs to be better informed about U.S. projects at the local level, in particular those being implemented by Coalition forces, and stated that the DACS and NACS are not keeping the BPC advised through existing channels of communication. He asked, as he has in the past, that the Embassy provide written notification to the BPC whenever a local project is proposed or started, implying that the BPC should have a role in the project selection and approval process. He also suggested that a new round of local elections may facilitate a smoother working relationship between local and provincial government.

(Comment: Mueen has a point: the BPC should have a role to play in the process. The members of the DACs and NACS were designated via local caucuses, not elected, prior to the development of significant national political parties and the national elections in January 2005. Thus many of the members do not have strong affiliations to established parties. The members of the BPC, by contrast, were elected in January 2005 on a party basis and the BPC is dominated by party loyalists. End comment.)

¶9. (C) In response to Mueen's points, PRT Team Leader suggested that a project management unit be established at the BPC to track ongoing and proposed work in the province. PRT staff also discussed various ways to improve communication between all parties and reiterated earlier invitations to the BPC to attend weekly project meetings, as well as to commence monthly project meetings at City Hall between representatives of the BPC, PRT Baghdad, Multi-National Division-Baghdad, the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, and City Hall, an idea that appeared to interest the Chairman.

Valhalla Reparations Are Still Important

¶10. (C) Chairman Mueen expressed the BPC's satisfaction with the recent release of several detainees in connection with

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Operation Valhalla, but reiterated that the issue of reparations for victims of the raid remains of paramount importance to BPC members. He reiterated that the BPC needs a promise of assistance for the victims as it reconsiders its relationship with the Embassy.

Support for City Council is Illegal

¶11. (C) Chairman Mueen's tone sharpened when he began to discuss the Embassy's recent engagement with the Baghdad City Council (BCC). He stated that the Embassy's perceived support for the BCC is breeding mistrust in the BPC, and that Embassy engagement is essentially illegal. He went on to say that the Provincial Council will be 'very aggravated' if the PRT continues to deal with the BCC, positing that to do 'makes the terrorists happy'. PRT Team Leader explained that the Administrative Court had ruled in March that the BPC had wrongfully dissolved the BCC and that the PRT's interaction with the BCC is based upon this ruling, which the BPC has appealed (Ref B). PRT Team Leader emphasized the importance of the rule of law in dealing with the situation, and urged Chairman Mueen to communicate with the BCC to resolve their differences. Mueen betrayed confusion, asking what role the BCC would play in the province should the appeals court rule in its favor. He also urged the Embassy not to 'rush' to support

the BCC, saying local elections could change the political situation. (Comment. Mueen may have been alluding to an

alleged BPC plan to call for quick district-level elections to replace all the current members of the BCC if the court once again rules in its favor. Under CPA Order 71, the PBC apparently has the authority to organize such an election. We have been told, however, that some if not all members of the BPC would want to exclude the current members of the BCC from running for re-election, a course of action that would most probably be legally indefensible. End comment.)

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Throughout the discussion with the BPC leadership, it was evident that poor communication between individuals and institutions -- be it between the BPC and the Mayor's office or between the BPC and DACS -- remains a serious problem of local governance. Moreover, Mueen did not give any indication whatsoever that the BPC is considering legislative or policy actions in response to the challenges it now faces, nor that it sees a role for itself beyond that of project-management. This is rather unfortunate given the time and effort that the former provincial support team and the staff of the USAID-sponsored Local Governance Program expended in 2005 on BPC governance programming. Reducing the BPC's governance deficit will be the PRT's principal task in the months ahead. End comment.

KHALILZAD